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DIRECTORATE OF  
INTELLIGENCE

*Developments in Indochina*

State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA

(Information as of 1400)

CAMBODIA

Government troops are trying to retake positions along the Mekong River.

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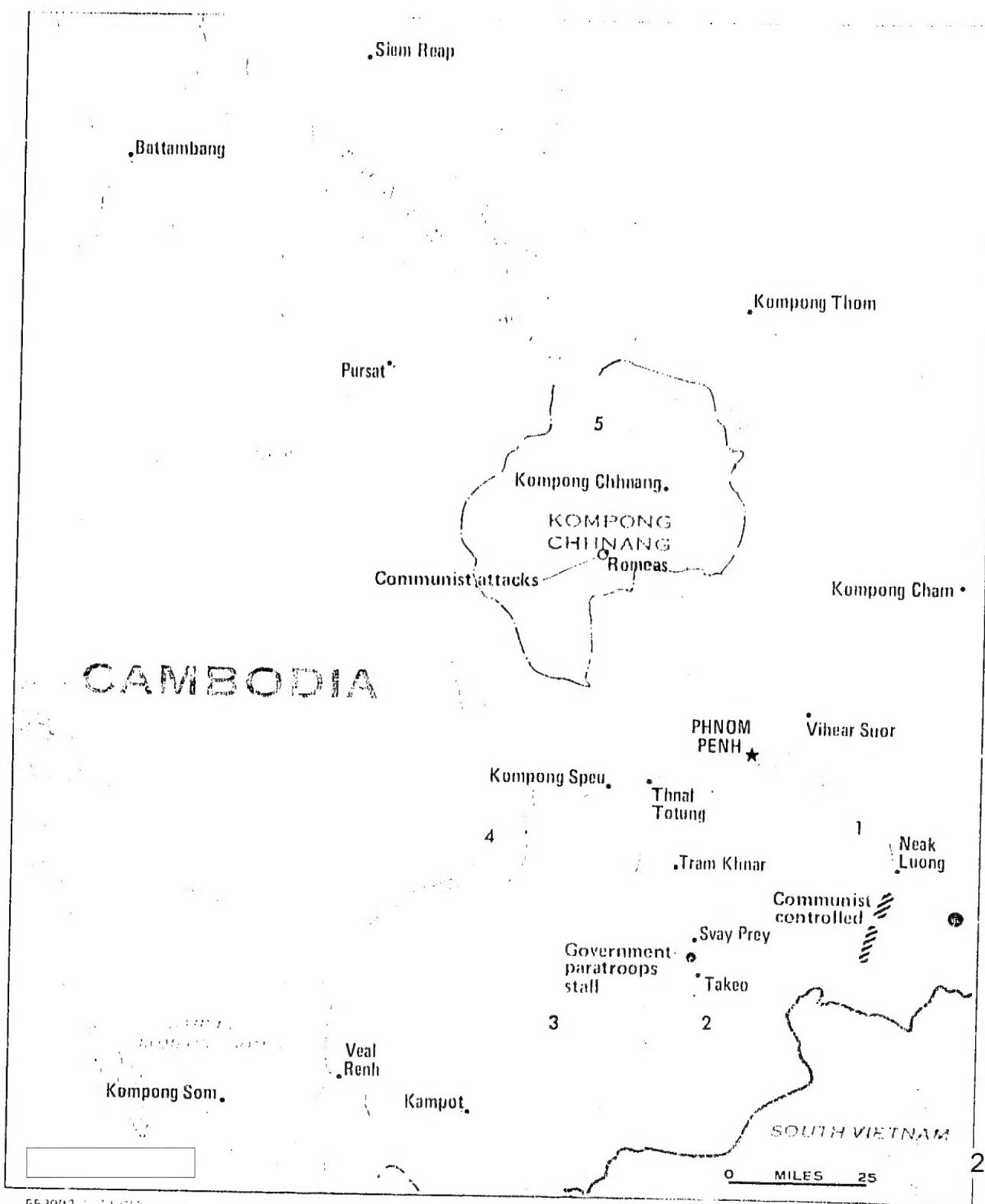
LAOS

A Communist armored unit attacked Muong Kassy on 12 January. Six more Lao Communist delegates to the peace talks will return to Samneua for consultations.

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● Communist-held location

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CAMBODIA

The government is moving to regain control over portions of the Mekong River's east bank. Lead elements of six battalions from Phnom Penh arrived in Neak Luong yesterday and began preparations for a drive southward to retake a number of small outposts lost to Khmer Communist units on Thursday. The battalions are to be supported by Cambodian Navy craft and by local security forces. East of the Neak Luong, the remaining government units on or near Route 1 are to be used to prevent any further insurgent advances on the government's riverine base.

The Cambodians estimate that seven or eight predominantly Khmer Communist battalions are in the areas south and east of Neak Luong. In both these sectors, the insurgents have capitalized on poor leadership displayed by some Cambodian Army commanders. Many government troops reportedly withdrew from their positions in the face of only light Communist pressure. The Cambodian units that pulled back from the Mekong destroyed or abandoned ten 75-mm. howitzers and approximately 2,000 round of ammunition--the bulk of the army's artillery capability along the river.

In the south government forces clearing south and west of Tram Khnar on Route 3 are meeting moderate Communist opposition. To the east, the three government paratroop battalions from Takeo that are on Route 2 moving slowly toward the besieged garrisons at Svay Prey and Thnal Totung have been stalled by harassing attacks. In the past four days, the paratroops have suffered casualties of five killed and 47 wounded.

Northwest of Phnom Penh, Communist forces in Kompong Chhnang Province are continuing to put pressure on government defenders at Romeas, a former army

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training camp. The Communists began their attacks on 5 January, and no relief is in sight for this isolated outpost. Communist shellings and ground probes against Romeas on 12 January resulted in Cambodian losses of 16 killed and 58 wounded.

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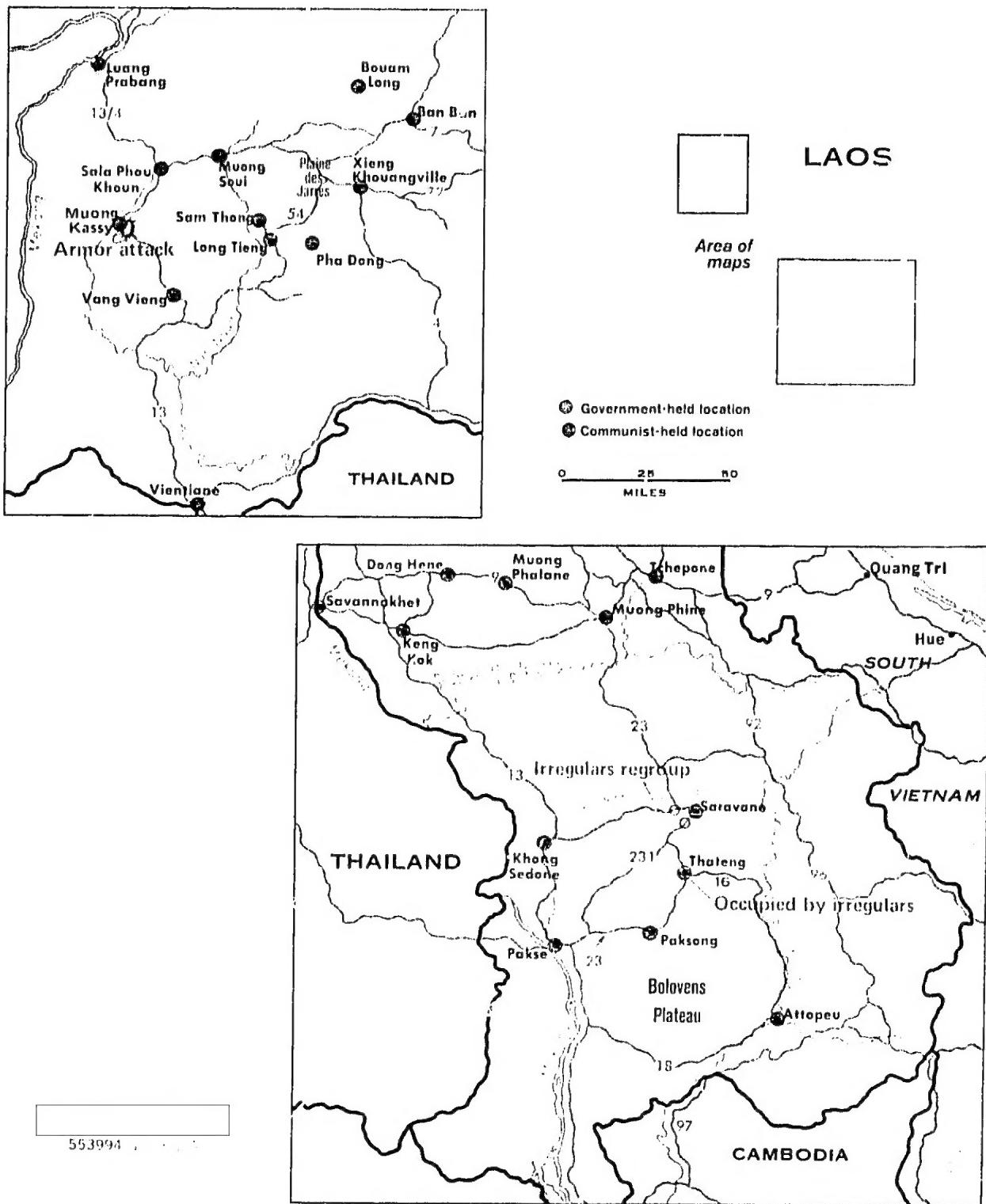
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LAOS

A Communist armored unit on 12 January attacked Muong Kassy, a town on Route 13 some 25 miles north of the major government logistics base at Vang Vieng. Preliminary reports indicate that two Communist PT-76 amphibious tanks penetrated as far as the airstrip near the town. One tank broke down and the second was destroyed. A prisoner captured near the town during the attack claimed that a dissident neutralist armored unit is in the Muong Kassy area and still has three tanks.

The presence of enemy armor on Route 13 north of Vang Vieng will add to the consternation in Vientiane. Defense Minister Sisouk na Champassak is now personally involved in government planning to redress the situation along Route 13.

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A Small Plum in the South

A 900-man irregular force on 11 January met no resistance when it occupied Ban Thateng at the junction of Routes 23 and 16, just north of the Bolovens Plateau. The presence of the government force at Thateng may create supply problems for North Vietnamese infantry and artillery units concentrated around Saravane, some 20 miles to the north, and may prompt a Communist counterattack soon.

Enemy pressure against government units near Saravane eased somewhat on 11 January. Field commanders have regrouped their troops south and west of the town and have sent small teams back toward Saravane to direct airstrikes on enemy units.

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More Peace Delegates off to Samneua

Six more members of the Lao Communist delegation to the Vientiane peace talks are returning to Samneua, apparently for consultations. Prime Minister Souvanna Phouma told Ambassador Godley that chairman Phoun Sipraseuth along with the deputy chairman and four other delegates will leave for the Communist administrative center immediately after the 16 January session of the talks. Two other ranking delegates left for Samneua on 6 January saying they were returning to obtain new instructions in light of the resumption of the Paris talks, and that they would be back in Vientiane within ten days.

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